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FORTY-NINTH SESSION

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FIFTH COMMITTEE
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at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 2nd MEETING

Chairman: Mr. TEIRLINCK (Belgium)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

ELECTION OF THE VICE-CHAIRMEN AND RAPPORTEUR

1. The CHAIRMAN informed the Committee that the Group of Asian States and the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States had nominated, respectively, Mr. Mahmoud Barimani (Islamic Republic of Iran) and Miss Marta Peña (Mexico) for the two offices of Vice-Chairman. Noting that no other candidates had been nominated, he suggested that the Committee should refrain from holding a secret ballot.

2. It was so decided.

3. Mr. Mahmoud Barimani (Islamic Republic of Iran) and Miss Marta Peña (Mexico) were elected Vice-Chairmen by acclamation.

4. The CHAIRMAN informed the Committee that the Group of African States had nominated Mr. Larbi Djacta (Algeria) for the office of Rapporteur. Noting that no other candidates had been nominated, he suggested that the Committee should refrain from holding a secret ballot.

5. It was so decided.

6. Mr. Larbi Djacta (Algeria) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.

AGENDA ITEM 17: APPOINTMENTS TO FILL VACANCIES IN SUBSIDIARY ORGANS AND OTHER APPOINTMENTS:

(a) APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY QUESTIONS (A/49/101/Add.1)

7. The CHAIRMAN drew the Committee's attention to a note (A/49/101/Add.1) in which the Secretary-General informed the General Assembly of the resignation of Mr. Tadanori Inomata (Japan) from his seat on the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. The Japanese Government had proposed that Mr. Yuji Kumamaru should fill the seat in question until the expiry of Mr. Inomata's mandate, i.e. until 31 December 1995.

8. He suggested that the Committee should recommend the appointment by acclamation of Mr. Yuji Kumamaru to fill the seat in question from the date on which the General Assembly approved the appointment until 31 December 1995.

9. It was so decided.

10. The CHAIRMAN noted that the General Committee of the General Assembly had endorsed the Secretary-General's recommendations on the organization of the forty-ninth session and future sessions of the Assembly (A/BUR/49/1, sects. II and III). He stressed in particular the considerable importance of the recommendation on punctuality and the recommendation calling on Member States to do their utmost to avoid submitting proposals requesting the Secretary-General

(The Chairman)

to prepare new reports. The volume of reports to be submitted had a direct impact on whether they could be made available on time, which was an indispensable condition for the smooth running of debates.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK (A/C.5/49/L.1)

Programme of work (A/C.5/49/L.1)

11. The CHAIRMAN referred to a table in which the Secretariat had submitted a tentative programme of work for the Committee; the table had been drawn up taking account of the availability of documentation, the status of which was indicated in a note from the Secretariat (A/C.5/49/L.1). He noted that rationalization of the Committee's work seemed to have had little effect on its workload. He hoped that the Committee would look at the question of meetings held between January and August in order to make it easier for delegations and the Secretariat to plan their work.

12. He reviewed the dates scheduled for the general discussions on various agenda items. Regarding item 108 (Programme planning), he drew the attention of the Committee members to the recommendations made by the Committee for Programme and Coordination, which he had also drawn to the attention of the General Committee of the General Assembly, inviting the Chairmen of the Main Committees to ensure that their work was organized in such a way that the revisions of the medium-term plan could be examined before the Fifth Committee considered the item to which the revisions related.

13. He suggested that the Committee should adopt the tentative programme of work which had been submitted to them.

14. It was so decided.

15. Mr. BOIN (France) expressed his approval of all the measures outlined by the Chairman. In addition, he suggested that the Fifth Committee should agree to restrict the length of statements, as was done in the governing bodies of the United Nations Development Programme and United Nations Children's Fund, which restricted statements to eight minutes' duration. Moreover, he would like the Secretariat to report the notional costs per hour of meeting time and per page of documentation, as was requested of it in General Assembly resolution 48/222.

16. He also wondered how the members of the Fifth Committee could take up the item on pattern of conferences on 20 October, as suggested in the tentative programme of work when one of the most important documents in that respect - the detailed survey of the resources necessary to ensure the adequate provision of conference services - would not be available until mid-November. In conclusion, he suggested that the consideration of agenda item 132 (Administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of the United Nations peace-keeping operations) should be brought forward by one or two weeks, since document A/48/945 (Effective planning, budgeting and administration of peace-keeping operations) had been available for some time.

17. The CHAIRMAN said that the question of restricting the length of statements could be considered at a later meeting and that he would keep that concern in mind.

18. Mr. CHUINKAM (Cameroon) said that the Fifth Committee should consider its tentative programme of work at its next meeting so as to give the smaller delegations, in particular, time to consult with their Governments as to which items they felt should be considered on a priority basis.

19. Mr. SHARP (Australia) said that the difficulties encountered by the Fifth Committee during the forty-eighth session had been due in large part to the late publication of documents, particularly the reports of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. He hoped that the fact that the Committee's tentative programme of work had not been distributed to its members until the morning of its 2nd meeting would not adversely affect its work.

20. The Controller should provide members of the Fifth Committee, the Advisory Committee and the Secretariat at the beginning of the session with details of the programme of work relating to the financing of peace-keeping operations, so that the budgets for the individual operations could be considered and adopted well in advance. It would also be advisable to consider agenda item 132 one or two weeks earlier than scheduled, since the early consideration of that item would facilitate the adoption of resolutions on the peace-keeping operations.

21. Ms. STODDARD (United States of America) said she hoped that the adoption of the tentative programme of work would not prevent Member States from raising issues which, while falling within the purview of the Fifth Committee, had not been included in the tentative programme of work.

22. The CHAIRMAN said that the point raised by Ms. Stoddard was consistent with current practice.

23. Mrs. RODRIGUEZ (Cuba) said that a note should be sent to the Chairmen of the other Main Committees requesting them to indicate the views of members of their respective committees on issues relating to agenda item 105 (Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations) and in particular on the report relating to the restructuring of the United Nations Secretariat (A/49/336).

24. Mr. ACAKPO-SATCHIVI (Secretary of the Committee), replying to the representatives of France and Australia, said that the consideration of the pattern of conferences, which was scheduled to begin in mid-October, was not expected to end until early December and that, consequently, the Fifth Committee would therefore have the time to consider in detail the resources needed to provide adequate conference services. The matter of administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of United Nations peace-keeping operations could not be considered one or two weeks ahead of schedule since the Advisory Committee's workload would prevent it from submitting its report before late October. As to the suggestion of the representative of Cameroon, he failed to see the need to postpone the adoption of a programme of work which was merely tentative and was likely to be amended several times.

25. The CHAIRMAN endorsed the comment just made.

26. Mr. TAKASU (Controller), replying to the representative of Australia, said that the Secretariat was preparing a table that would indicate for each operation the length of the mandate, the period covered by the corresponding budget and the timing of any relevant General Assembly decisions. That arrangement would allow commitments to be approved before the start of the corresponding fiscal year.

27. Mr. SHARP (Australia) said that he was satisfied with the Controller's reply. However, given the importance of agenda item 132, and its impact on the financing of each of the peace-keeping operations, he believed that the Chairman of the Advisory Committee might be prevailed upon to bring forward its consideration by the Committee.

28. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the Committee had not yet completed its consideration of the questions before it and that it had yet to consider item 104 - Financial reports and audited financial statements, and reports of the Board of Auditors - before turning to item 132. The Committee would, however, endeavour to speed up its work so as to be able to consider the report (A/48/945) as soon as possible, and it would keep the Fifth Committee informed of the progress of its work.

29. Mr. CHABALA (Zambia) said it was his understanding that the Fifth Committee would bring forward the consideration of certain items if the relevant documents were ready ahead of time. In that regard, he recalled that, in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 48/264, reports requested of the Secretary-General should be made available in a timely manner with a view to enabling delegations to consider the substance of such reports more thoroughly in advance of meetings. However, the Fifth Committee would not have in advance all the essential documents it would need in order to consider, for example, the item on improving the financial situation of the United Nations.

30. Mrs. EMERSON (Portugal) suggested that the Fifth Committee should consider item 105 (Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations) before item 104 since, contrary to normal procedure, none of the reports of the Board of Auditors had yet been issued. The Advisory Committee would of course also have to reverse the order in which it considered those two items.

31. Miss PEÑA (Mexico) said she also felt that it would be very useful to know the views of the other Main Committees on the question of the restructuring of the United Nations Secretariat and that a note should be sent to that end to the Chairman of each of the Committees. Moreover, it was reasonable to consider agenda item 132 two weeks ahead of schedule. However, just as the Advisory Committee had been requested to submit as soon as possible its reports on documents which had already been issued, the Secretariat should also be requested to publish as soon as possible the outstanding reports on the question.

32. Mr. KELLY (Ireland) said that he wondered whether it would not be more appropriate, in view of the particularly heavy workload of the Fifth Committee, to consider the financing of the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) once only instead of considering it again in early December as scheduled in the tentative programme of work.

33. Mr. ACAKPO-SATCHIVI (Secretary of the Committee), referring to the Cuban representative's proposal concerning the report on the restructuring of the Secretariat, in particular its impact on programmes (A/49/336), said that the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) had considered the report but had not requested that the other Main Committees should also take it up. The Chairman could perhaps send a letter to the chairmen of the other committees; that would have to be done through the General Committee of the General Assembly. The consideration of the report had been entrusted to the Fifth Committee. If the Committee did not reach satisfactory conclusions, the question could be submitted to the General Assembly, which would then refer it to the other committees.

34. Mr. TAKASU (Controller), addressing the representative of Ireland, explained why the Secretariat had felt that the discussion on agenda item 120 should be divided into two parts. The Security Council's current mandate for ONUSAL would expire at the end of November. It had initially been envisaged that the operation would end on that date. However, following certain recent political events, the country concerned had requested an extension of the mandate of the operation. Consideration was currently being given to the recommendations to be submitted to the Security Council in that respect. Furthermore, the General Assembly had authorized commitments only up to the end of September. There were therefore two questions to be considered in connection with item 120: the financing of the current mandate up to the end of November and the financing of the later phase which would be the subject of further budgetary proposals, depending on the decision taken by the Security Council.

35. Miss PEÑA (Mexico) said that it was true that CPC had not made any recommendations regarding the report on the restructuring of the Secretariat. However Mexico, which had participated in the discussions in CPC as an observer, had noted some interest in that question because the report provided for precise mandates to carry out the changes in the structure of the Secretariat. Taking into account the approach outlined by the Secretary, she wondered whether the Committee would be opposed to asking the Chairman to request the General Committee to consult the other committees.

36. Mrs. RODRIGUEZ (Cuba) said that she supported the remarks made by the representative of Mexico.

37. Mr. BOIN (France) said that he was not in favour of the procedure suggested by the representatives of Cuba and Mexico. The report concerning the impact of restructuring on programmes had been requested by the Fifth Committee. It, therefore, had been the Committee which had received that report, through CPC. A simpler procedure would be for each delegation to hold consultations with its representatives in other committees. The debate in the Fifth Committee would be facilitated by proper coordination.

38. The CHAIRMAN said that the procedure suggested by the delegations of Cuba and Mexico would require the agreement of all the members of the Committee. It would perhaps be better to consult the committees at the level of missions, as suggested by the representative of France.

39. Mr. DAMICO (Brazil), referring to the many aspects included in agenda item 112 (Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations), requested clarification on the programme of work envisaged for the consideration of that item.

40. Mr. ACAKPO-SATCHIVI (Secretary of the Committee) recalled the information provided by the Chairman regarding the provisional programme of work, and noted that the report of the Committee on Contributions would be submitted on 6 October. If there were no speakers on the list for the general debate, the consideration of item 112 could begin a little later so as not to waste conference service resources. The general debate should not exceed two weeks because most of the work would be carried out in informal consultations.

41. Mr. FONTAINE-ORTIZ (Cuba) said that his delegation had officially made a proposal on which the Committee must take a decision. There were two possible approaches: a vote could be taken in accordance with the procedures governing the Committee's work, or the question could be referred to the General Committee so that it could consult the delegations concerned and possibly propose a solution. At the current stage, the latter procedure was perhaps preferable. At all events, his delegation found it unacceptable that a delegation had a right of veto in a Main Committee of the General Assembly.

42. The CHAIRMAN said that, following the request made by the representative of Cuba, the General Committee could meet to consider the question and the Committee could revert to it at its next meeting.

43. Mr. BLUKIS (Latvia), referring to agenda item 112 (Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations), recalled that the General Assembly had decided that, at the beginning of the forty-ninth session, it would consider the question of establishing an ad hoc body to study the implementation of the principle of capacity to pay. He asked the Secretariat to provide information on the work carried out in that respect.

44. Mr. STÖCKL (Germany), addressing the representative of Cuba, said that it was not a question of one delegation vetoing a procedure proposed to the Committee or of two other delegations imposing a decision. A procedure had been suggested and had given rise to an exchange of views. He supported the compromise solution put forward by Cuba.

45. Mr. CHABALA (Zambia) said that he shared that view. He also suggested that, during his consultations with the General Committee, the Chairman should raise the question of establishing a time-limit for the submission by the other Main Committees of proposals which might have financial implications.

46. The CHAIRMAN said that he took note of the suggestion.

47. Mr. FONTAINE-ORTIZ (Cuba) explained that, in speaking of a veto, he wished only to recall a principle. The Committee's work was governed by its rules of procedure and according to those rules, decisions were taken by a majority of the members present and voting unless the question was of major significance.

48. Mr. BOIN (France) reminded the representative of Cuba that the prevailing rule in the Committee was that of consensus, not majority vote.

49. Mr. FONTAINE-ORTIZ (Cuba) objected that consensus was a principle and not a rule promulgated by the General Assembly.

50. The CHAIRMAN, closing the discussion, recalled that the programme of work submitted to the Committee was only a draft and could be amended if the documents became available earlier. Accordingly, he took it that the Committee wished to adopt the programme of work, taking into account the views that had been expressed and subject to any change which might be required in the course of the session.

51. It was so decided.

52. The CHAIRMAN drew the Committee's attention to General Assembly resolution 48/233 C in which the Assembly had agreed, in principle, to establish an ad hoc body to study the implementation of the principle of capacity to pay as the fundamental criterion for determining the scale of assessments and to consider its mandates and modalities at a later stage in the forty-eighth session. Since it had not been possible to do that, the Committee had recommended to the General Assembly, and it had agreed, that the question should be referred to the forty-ninth session. He suggested that the working group should resume its work at the beginning of the week of 3 to 7 October under the chairmanship of Ambassador Maycock of Barbados.

53. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.